

EDITORIAL

SPEAK UP, MAGISTRATE HERBERT!

By DANIEL DE LEON

HENRY W. HERBERT a magistrate on the bench of the women's night court, takes direct issue with the investigators in Chicago and elsewhere who lay prostitution at the door of the low wages of shop girls.

"Nonsense!" retorts the magistrate. "Worse than nonsense. The argument is perfect rot; it is a libel on American womanhood!" And the magistrate proceeds to "prove his case" with a number of illustrations:—

1.—The shop girl who is on her guard against the advances of evil men meets the woman of her own station in life whose fine clothes and jewels excite her natural interest, perhaps her envy. No man could have brought about the girl's ruin, but she falls an easy victim to the suggestion of the other girl, who laughs at the cheap finery of her sister, and pointing in derision to her \$28 hat says:

"You're a fool if you like pretty things and don't get them. Just look at what I'm wearing."

—Your Honor! Aren't you trying to impose upon the "dear public's" lack of legal that training? Or is it, perhaps, that you are less of a jurist than you should, and pretend to be, and do not yourself realize that you have not stated facts enough to make out your case? You say nothing about the wealth the shop girl in your illustration produces. That her wages are small follows from your own description of her finery as "cheap." If the wealth she produces is at all in proportion to the vastness of the wealth her class produces, and yet she, like the rest of her class, receives in return such a small pittance that she can afford only "cheap finery," what else is happening to her but to be pinched with want of necessities? What else is ailing her but low wages?

2.—"Then there is the negligence of parents, due sometimes to indifference, but

much more often to the many cares of the woman who has a large family and has to work hard to care for the younger ones.”

—Your Honor! Have you not tipped yourself? How comes that woman to work so hard as to have no time to attend to her elder daughter, and to present such an aspect of tiresome toil as likely to hint to her elder daughter to avoid the ordeal by all means? That woman is of the working class. If married, how comes it that her husband, an active member of the vast-wealth producers, does not bestow upon her the amplex that he would wish? Or, if she be a widow, how comes it that her husband’s share of the vast wealth he co-operated in producing is found in the home of the class that employed him, and not in the home of the wife whom he took to his heart and of the joint fruits of their love? Or if, whether still married or a widow, part of the “hard work” the woman in your illustration must perform is shop work, how comes her sweater to be the depository of the wealth that flows from her industry, she herself the depository of poverty too pinching to allow proper attention to her elder daughter? What else is ailing that woman and her daughter, but low wages?

Come, Magistrate Herbert, speak up!

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org